

## **Butterfly tagging is highest yet at Charlotte Rhoades Garden** 9/20/2018

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### **SOUTHWEST HARBOR**

Charlotte Rhoades Park and Butterfly Garden is having a record year for tagging monarch butterflies to track their migratory patterns.

"We've tagged almost 600 in the last few weeks, which is a record for us," said Ann Judd, master gardener and secretary of the garden's committee.

Master Gardener Martina Dittmar thinks the total will be closer to 800 for the season as there are still plenty of caterpillars in the garden waiting to become butterflies. In previous years the butterfly garden has tagged between 300 to 350 butterflies. "Last summer was my first year here," said Dittmar. "I brought in every single caterpillar I found."

When the volunteers and master gardeners locate a caterpillar in the garden, they bring them to cages inside the house on the site. The house is set to be demolished starting this week and a new building is being constructed to house the cages. Within the cages the caterpillars are fed milkweed for two weeks until they form a chrysalis.

"We have to keep stocking food for them because they eat voraciously," said Judd. "One whole caterpillar will eat a whole (milkweed) plant," said Dittmar. "It's kind of a lot of work to raise them because you want to make sure they don't run out of food." For two weeks the caterpillar transforms within the chrysalis until it hatches into a monarch. At that time, volunteers at the garden watch the new butterfly for a day while its wings become more rigid. When they hatch, the wings of the butterfly are floppy, according to Dittmar.

Once they are strong enough, the monarch is taken from the cage to be tagged. Tags, in the form of a small circular sticker, come from the Monarch Watch program, a citizen science project launched by the University of Kansas in 1992. Each tag lists the website of Monarch Watch, a 1-800 phone number to report the monarch found and a specific number for each monarch.

With each tag, the person placing the sticker has to record specific information for that butterfly.